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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 001050

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/FO SCA/A, S/CRS, EUR/RPM
NSC FOR WOOD
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CENTCOM FOR CG CSTC-A, CG CJTF-101 POLAD

SENSITIVE
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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [MOPS](#) [EAIR](#) [PGOV](#) [EFIN](#) [PREL](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: PRT CHAGHCHARAN: No Improvements in sight to Runway at Chaghcharan Airport

REF: Vilnius 272

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The Chaghcharan airport improvement project has had an off-again, on-again existence since the Asian Development Bank (ADB) first provided funding in 2004. The project as originally conceived by the Afghan government would cost approximately USD 3 million to refurbish runways, aprons and taxi ways. In mid-2007, the Lithuanian-led PRT voiced concerns about the improvements since they would make the runway unsuitable for C-130 traffic, which it can currently receive. The Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A) initially expressed interest in bringing the airport up to the C-130 standard, but was unable to provide the funding. The Ministry of Transportation and Civil Aviation (MoTCA) has used up all the ADB funding on cost over-runs at other airports. The Afghan government has requested additional funding from the ADB, and Lithuania has tentatively allocated part of its budget for Afghanistan operations to improve the airport. It is unlikely that the airstrip will be improved in the near to medium term.

In The Beginning

¶2. (SBU) In November 2004, the ADB provided approximately USD 20 million to the Afghan government for the rehabilitation and widening of existing runways and construction of aprons and taxi ways at selected regional airports. The plan was to spend approximately USD 3 million each on seven regional airports. During the first round of bidding, a Turkish company submitted a bid for USD 13 million for the Chaghcharan project. The bidding was subsequently re-opened but no bidders were qualified.

¶3. (SBU) In mid-2007, the Lithuanian-led PRT in Ghor province became concerned when they learned that the refurbished runway would only support aircraft up to an operational weight of 21 tons. The operational weight of a C-130 is approximately 71 tons, and the PRT is heavily dependent on C-130 traffic for life support due to its remote location and lack of serviceable roads. Currently, Chaghcharan receives four to six C-130s in a week. If the airstrip were refurbished only to the level requested by the Afghan government, the planned thin-crust runway would not support C-130s. Without C-130 supply flights, the PRT would have to close.

Search for Alternative Sources of Funding

¶4. (SBU) In its 2007 budget for Afghanistan operations, Lithuania

did not allocate funds to upgrade the airport. They contacted different entities to try to identify alternative sources of funding. CSTC-A expressed interest in funding the difference between the amount that ADB would provide and the amount needed to make the airport C-130 worthy, since the airport is strategically important due to its location in the approximate geo-center of Afghanistan. (Ghor's small population and limited agricultural and craft production are insufficient to make a strong economic argument for the airport.) CSTC-A engineers estimated that it would cost approximately USD 28 million to make the Chaghcharan airport C-130 capable.

Lithuania Makes the Rounds

15. (SBU) Lithuanian representatives raised their concerns with the governor of Ghor Province, CSTC-A, ISAF HQ, the ADB and the MoTCA. After several on-again, off-again rounds between the ADB and the MoTCA, the project stalled because it was dependent on having funds left over after other, higher-priority airports were refurbished (such as Badghis, Faryab and Badakhshan). Unfortunately, cost over-runs have used up all the ADB funding. CENTCOM has directed CSTC-A to focus on airports in southern Afghanistan and to be more "careful" about spending U.S. funds, and therefore CSTC-A has withdrawn its potential support for the Chaghcharan airport.

Effort Continues

16. (SBU) In March 2008, the MoTCA told the Lithuanians and ISAF that it would ask the ADB for additional funding for the Chaghcharan airport. The MoTCA said that if the ADB turned down its request, MoTCA would go to the Ministry of Finance to identify other funding. Lithuania has tentatively decided to allocate part of its budget for Afghanistan to improve the airport.

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WOOD